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SUBJECT: TURKEY: CORRUPTION INVESTIGATION AT HABUR GATE SLOWS FUEL TRUCK TRAFFIC

11. (U) On June 28 the flow of fuel trucks across Habur Border Gate was drastically reduced in both directions for nearly one day as a result of the arrest of 30 officials at the gate, allegedly for irregular handling of petroleum products. The press reported that the Silopi Prosecutor stopped transport through the gate for most of the day based on truck drivers' complaints that gate officials charged with detecting excess fuel (i.e., amounts of fuel exceeding the capacity of each individual truck--and therefore taxable--and carried in barrels) had seized extra fuel and stored it in tankers, allegedly for private use or sale. As of the morning of June 30, the flow of trucks across the border had picked up only slightly. It remains uncertain how long it will take before a more normal flow of traffic across the border will resume.

Earlier Meetings with Gate Officials

12. (SBU) AMCON Adana conoffs called on acting Habur Gate sub-governor Haci Mehmet Kara on June 21. The Habur MFA representative and the TOBB consortium construction manager joined the meeting while in progress. Kara expressed confidence that the gate could continue to expand its operating capacity since the southbound construction project largely was completed and he had inspectors visibly working five of six available customs inspections stations, each of which he said was equipped with scales. He mentioned that both north and southbound bridge resurfacing also was complete. The TOBB construction manager said that remaining project work was focused on completion of the initial northbound security assessment area followed by the northbound customs inspection stations. Visible work to pour concrete over a wide concrete apron leading from the northbound inspection stations to a pre-exit marshalling area was visible on June 21. Kara and the MFA representative said that the GoT agreed with the concept of multiple eventual border crossing with Iraq, mentioning Ovakoy as the second proposed site and saying that a third potential crossing could be placed between the Habur and Ovakoy sites, if traffic so demanded. When discussion of the current renovation project's completion arose, Kara ventured "late July, early August," as the likely completion window. Later the TOBB representative, who runs the project, said "middle to late August" is a more likely completion date, adding that "it will be no later than August when we get this project done." Efforts to determine the exact traffic flow between customs stations southbound were unsuccessful and a clear process was not evident to conoffs. However, traffic flow inside the recently-completed southbound customs holding area immediately before the inspection stations

and at the inspection stations themselves appeared more orderly than in past recent gate visits.

13. (SBU) At a subsequent June 21 weekly border crossing meeting attended by Turkish, Iraqi and U.S. military officials, Turkish and Iraqi officials discussed a possible plan to schedule most northbound Iraqi fuel oil shipments, which account for up to 150 tankers daily, between 0500 and 0900 (local). Iraqi officials also complained to GoT officials that a shipment of U.S.-origin frozen chicken from the Koch company had arrived at the Ibrahim Khalil side in spoiled fashion and thus was rejected, explaining a traffic snarl earlier in the week. The Turkish truckers union representative asked that cargo trucks carrying "rejected merchandise" be given a priority to return to Turkey over other northbound traffic. Both Turkish and Iraqi officials were non-committal in response.

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